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## **GAY MEN/MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN HIV PREVENTION INITIATIVE**

### **What you should know:**

In California, the vast majority of adult male HIV and AIDS cases are among gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM), and that number increases if gay men/MSM who inject drugs are included. Many factors contribute to risk behavior among gay men/MSM.

- An altered perception of AIDS as a “manageable disease” rather than a “death sentence” may contribute to gay men/MSM being less diligent about safer sex.
- Inflated HIV treatment optimism is a potential contributor to a decrease in perceived threat of HIV.
- Medical misinformation, especially in communities of color, that there is a “cure” for HIV may also diminish the threat.
- In their personal lives, gay men/MSM are no longer regularly confronted with as many people who look ill and are dying, which may contribute to the decreased perception of HIV risk.

The simplistic HIV prevention messages that were effective early in the HIV epidemic have limited efficacy in addressing the complex societal issues that influence some gay men/MSM’s risk-taking behaviors including depression, loneliness/isolation, and discrimination. For gay men/MSM of color, the intersection between racism and homophobia in combination with limited community support creates an environment largely unable to support positive behaviors. Limited life experiences of young gay men/MSM translate to limited self-efficacy around sexual negotiation. Age-appropriate thrill seeking behavior and a sense of invincibility may also influence risk-taking behaviors for young gay men.

### **What we do:**

The HIV Education and Prevention Services Branch within the California Department of Health Services, Office of AIDS (OA) implemented the Gay Men/Men who have Sex with Men HIV Prevention Initiative. Planning for this Initiative began as a response to the ongoing impact of the epidemic on gay men/MSM as documented by statewide epidemiological data. The goal of the Initiative is to reduce HIV incidence and prevalence among gay men and non-gay identified MSM. It is used as the framework to guide HIV prevention efforts and includes research, programmatic, and evaluation efforts.

OA focuses its efforts in two broad categories, program/interventions and policy, to slow the spread of HIV among gay men/MSM. Programs funded by OA reflect interventions that are guided by the community planning process as well as targeted programs to reach specific populations. The interventions guided by community planning focus on



health education and risk reduction, and take the form of both individual-oriented interventions and group activities that help to reduce risk and improve healthier behaviors. In addition, OA funds interventions through the Universitywide AIDS Research Program targeting: 1) MSM of color who do not identify as gay; 2) gay men/MSM who use methamphetamine; and 3) gay men/MSM who use the Internet.

Major policy areas on this subject include integrating health and wellness into HIV prevention and care interventions serving gay men/MSM, and requiring a strategic plan that addresses the needs of gay men/MSM who use methamphetamine, in counties with high prevalence rates of methamphetamine use.

**Who we serve:**

Gay men, non-gay identified MSM, and non-gay identified MSM who have sex with both men and women.

**Helpful resources:**

- For information on other local HIV/AIDS services, see the *California AIDS Clearinghouse Resource Directory* at Website <http://www.hivinfo.org/links/lhj.htm>.
- For information about HIV/AIDS, call the:
  - *California AIDS Hotline* at 1-800-367-AIDS (English/Spanish/Filipino) or 1-888-225-AIDS (TDD).
  - *National AIDS Hotline* at 1-800-342-AIDS (English), 1-800-344-SIDA (Spanish), or 1-800-243-7889 (TDD).
- For information on gay men/MSM health, see the:
  - Gay, Lesbian Medical Association Website at <http://www.glma.org>.
  - Gay Men's Health Crisis Website at <http://www.gmhc.org>.
- For information on OA's mission, programs, and other helpful resources, see Website <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/AIDS>.

